

Healing Trauma: The Light Shines Through the Broken Places

~ a talk by Tara Brach presented on March 08, 2017

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Namaste and welcome.

I often talk about trance, so I thought I would start with an illustrative story. This was shared by a mom who is very much into organic foods and a healthy lifestyle. She describes one evening when she hadn't had time to get to the grocery store and she was exhausted. She writes:

“I looked for what we could possibly eat for dinner. Thank goodness there was a frozen pizza in the freezer. ‘Okay guys, we are going to have a frozen pizza for dinner!’ I tried to keep the guilt out of my voice that it wasn’t going to be hand-made, home-made-organic-with-love-meal. My son instantly resisted, ‘But I don’t want frozen pizza!’ I remained calm and said, ‘But that is what we are having tonight.’ And he remained resistant, getting more and more upset, on the verge of a tantrum, ‘I don’t want frozen pizza! I don’t want frozen pizza!’ I tried to remain calm and repeated, ‘This is dinner tonight. It is what we have in the house. It will be okay. Have you ever had frozen pizza?’ Meanwhile, I was going crazy in my mind: *I am such a bad mom, of course my kids don’t like frozen pizza, I don’t like it either, I am doing the best I can and I am falling short today, but it is the best I can and I have created a monster of a child who only eat healthy, organic, home-made food! He is spoiled and doesn’t understand how much work it is! I have completely lost my sense of myself to these kids, they are taking over, I am raising entitled brats! I am a bad mom! Maybe I could make it to the store... No, that is just giving in.* ‘That is what we are going to have for dinner tonight, sweetie. And I am tired and that is what we will have, it will be okay,’ I say relatively calmly. I take a deep breath and look at my son’s tear-streaked face. He looks at me and says, actually quite calmly for a three-year old, ‘Okay mama. But could we at least heat it up?’”

So, this is a mild mannered trance story. *Trance* means that our perceptual filters have narrowed and we are just taking in a sliver of the world. When it is driven by our negativity-bias or the sense that something is wrong, we get very torqued. It is a lot of suffering. What I would like to explore tonight is how we work with a more

painful kind of trance that occurs when it is being driven by strong fear or trauma. It feels like a really important domain because trauma and strong fear are so pervasive, even for those of us that don't think of ourselves as traumatized. We all have seasons where we get in the grip.

The question I am most regularly asked after classes or workshops is: *What do I do if it feels like too much?* Meditation instructions are so often to come into the body and open to what is here and then to be with it with kindness and with clarity. *What do I do if it feels like too much? What if I feel I am going to get overwhelmed? What do I do if I feel so agitated, I just can't even sit with it?* These are the kinds of questions I am asked, and they come up so often because many of us have, within us, pockets of trauma-based fear and agitation and we organize our lives around not feeling them.

I'll give you some of the statistics:

It is estimated that seventy percent of us have had a traumatic experience in our life, and that twenty percent of those go on to experience post-traumatic stress syndrome—the different symptoms that circle around trauma. So, that is one of five of us. And there is further research that narrows it down. It says that one in five Americans was sexually molested as a child, one in four was beaten by a parent to the point of leaving a mark, and one in three couples engage in physical violence. That is a lot of people.

We sometimes think of trauma as emotional, sexual abuse or physical abuse, or war, or major natural disasters, but there is a whole range of life-experiences that are traumatizing. They can include surgery and illness and the sudden loss of a loved one. They include the ending of a relationship when it is not expected, or even when it is. I think many people can feel into the nervous system of our society and sense that there is a lot of trauma there, and it's from all sides of the political spectrum. It is the trauma of the segments of the population that have been hit hard by job loss or poverty. The trauma of immigrants, the trauma of refugees, the trauma of non-dominant populations that experience regular violence, injustice, oppression.

Much of the trauma is generational. For example, the trauma of slavery—of having your people transported as slaves to another continent and then the continued violence and violations that are perpetuated through the institutions of that country,

it doesn't go away really quickly. Research is showing that generational violence is handed down biologically. You can actually see it. Faulkner says: "The past is never dead; it is not even past."¹ Okay? You can see it in families where emotional and sexual abuse is handed down through the generations. It goes on and on.

How many of you have known trauma close up, either in your own being or with someone in your close circle? If we want to be able to help ourselves and each other and our society, we need to understand the challenge of trauma. It is very easy to see the effects of trauma and just be angry at yourself or the person or society that is traumatized, and not get the tremendously powerful set of circumstances that are driving it.

There is something that I have noticed – and this is now the other side of things – which is that many people, when they have come to terms with "Okay, there is trauma here," and they have actually gone into a path of recovery from trauma, have come into an experience of profound spiritual healing. So trauma and the awfulness of it, when faced, can bring about a very deep kind of waking up. Many of you know Leonard Cohen's well-known line: "In the broken places the light shines through." In the broken places the light shines through . . . when we deepen our attention.

I have seen and worked with so many people that have been traumatized and I have it very close up in my life too, like many of you. And I have seen that trauma is a cutting off. It is a cutting off within our own body, it is a cutting off with others. That is the pain—the pain of separation. And the process of recovery is a reconnection to the sacred, to a real sense of spirit. So this is what I want to look at in this particular talk. We are going to explore what trauma is and the path of recovery that really goes all the way to a deep sense freedom and awakening.

We will cover this in four parts. The first part will look at being able to recognize and understand the suffering of trauma because, as I mentioned, if we don't, we will blame. There is a lot of shame that surrounds trauma, and a lot of blame outwards. We can relate to it with compassion if we can understand the nature of its suffering. Next, we will look at we can resource trauma. How can we bring in enough safety and love to begin to work with it? Part three is presence. How do we really

¹ Faulkner, W. (1951). *Requiem for a Nun*. New York: Random House.

reconnect with the unlived life that is there that we have been avoiding? And the last part is then: How do we then live from a more fearless heart?

Okay, number one. What is trauma? In a simple way, you could just say that, when our nervous system is overwhelmed and our coping strategies don't work, we get traumatized. When our normal ways of coping—fight-flight-freeze, being able to navigate a situation—don't work, we get traumatized. And if the trauma is not processed or if we aren't eventually able to fight off, or get away from, or in some way manage what is attacking us, then we freeze in a way that the unprocessed fear gets locked into our body—into our tissues. And then that brings up all the symptoms that are called PTSD that include anxiety, and include depression, and include dissociation—because we are trying to get away from our body. This also includes intrusive thoughts that come in and really torment us. It includes sleeplessness for many people, and avoidant behaviors that very much turn into addictive behaviors. As I have come back to a couple of times already, PTSD is almost always very much coated by and held together by a sense of shame. It is a really terrible Catch 22. Something happens and we get traumatized and we are coping as best as we can with these strategies and then we hate ourselves for it because they don't look good and feel good. And that shame, by the way, binds the whole process.

What is actually going on inside us when we get traumatized? This is what is interesting to me because I am beginning to, more and more, understand trauma as a breakdown in communication. When we are an integrated person, all parts of our body communicate with each other. There is a flow of energy and information moving through. When we get traumatized, that breaks down. Certain parts of our brain have evolved to monitor for danger and, when we have been traumatized, they become over-activated and pick up on all sorts of triggers that might be interpreted in the mind as trouble, but are not really danger. So, the body is constantly in a flush of stress and reactivity and we are seeing the world not through rose-colored lenses, but through the lens of pure fear.

And I have shared before, the most useful way of understanding this breakdown in communication that accompanies trauma is an image from Dr. Dan Siegel, a psychiatrist and author. In his hand model of the brain, he demonstrates the structure of the brain as a fist—you might want to make a fist yourself if you haven't done this before—this is your brain. If you open it up, your arm is your spinal column,

your wrist going up into the heel of the palm is the brain stem, and your thumb is your limbic system. Your brain stem and your limbic system work together to regulate arousal—fight-flight-freeze and emotions. The four fingers come over the thumb, this is your frontal cortex. The cortex is the thinking and reasoning part of the brain, and the frontal cortex, in particular—where your forehead is—that is the site of mindfulness. It is the site of compassion and the whole compassion network. It is the site of morality and perspective.

When the brain is integrated, this frontal cortex down-regulates. What that means is that you might get a message saying: *Danger coming up!* And the frontal cortex will say: *No, it kind of seems like that thing that happened in the past, but now is now and you are okay.* And that calms down the limbic system.

But what happens when you are not integrated and in good communication? When you have been traumatized and there is not good communication going on and the frontal cortex isn't giving its information? Fear and messages of danger come up and you *flip your lid*. You basically lose contact with the frontal cortex, and are living in an unintegrated state where this fear-based sub-cortical looping is in control. It has hijacked your system. ²

What I didn't know until more recently was that the stress-chemicals, mostly cortisol, that flood through our system when we are really frightened actually destroy neurons, and they particularly have an effect on the neurons that connect the more far-reaching parts of the brain. So, if you have been traumatized and there is already less communication between the frontal cortex and the limbic system, you completely lose contact much more quickly and are living in that place of feeling like, "I am in the thick of it, I am in danger with no good way to deal with it." That is the communications break down. If you think of the opposite, when communications are flowing, in a way it is like the state of enlightenment—a state of full integration where all the circuits are connected and you are really able to light up.

Not only do we have a communications breakdown internally when there has been trauma, but our interpersonal communications also break down. Why is that? The

² Siegel, D. J., M.D., & Hartzell, M., M.ED. (2004). *Parenting from the Inside Out: How a Deeper Self-Understanding Can Help You Raise Children Who Thrive*. New York, NY: Penguin Group.

frontal cortex that down-regulates emotions is also what allows us to pick up really important information from each other in order to be able to have empathy and to be able to sense what is going on for another person. When there isn't good communication internally, we can't tell whether another person means well for us, or is a threat, and we are much more at the mercy of our negativity-bias that perceives threat, feels unsafe and can't trust.

It sounds pretty awful—our communications are cut off inside and we are cut off from the world—when we are in the state of trauma, it is pretty awful. But everything that has been disconnected can be reconnected, and the rest of the talk will be how we do that.

Now, interestingly, to communicate fully and in order to be able to play and mate and nurture our young and nurture each other, we actually have to be able to turn off our defense systems. You can't really make love and be nurturing if you are on high alert and your defenses are on. There was a very interesting experiment back in ninety-ninety-eight, by a neuroscientist named Jaak Panksepp. He observed young rat pups in their cage doing the whole rough-and-tumble of their play. He watched them for a number of days playing, and then he took one cat hair, put it in the cage, left it there for twenty-four hours and then removed it. And what do you think happened? They stopped playing completely. As soon as that trigger for danger was in their cage, it completely wiped out their play. Afterwards, they gradually began to play some, but never again in the same way.³

This brings up a really important question for us, even if we haven't been traumatized: *Where, in some way, are we perceiving a cat hair? Where do we have that embedded association with danger that is keeping us on defense and stopping us from playing?* And I actually mean the word *playing* because we don't play very much. So whether it is being able to be playful or nurturing, loving, whatever – there is a cat here in there and, for some people, in a very ongoing way, it can way more triggering than for others.

So, this is part one. We get cut off and then we add on shame. We blame ourselves for the ways that we are not communicating well and we blame ourselves for the

³ Panksepp, J. (1998). *Affective Neuroscience: The Foundations of Human and Animal Emotions*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

ways that we are self-soothing and behaving in addictive, avoidant ways. We blame ourselves over and over again.

A few years ago, when the economy dropped way down, one man I was working with had been laid off after his company had down-sized. He tried over and over again to find a new job and just couldn't. He was still looking when I caught up with him a year and a half or so later. And he was traumatized. It was like his work defined him, and he was really worried about his family and all the repercussions of being out of work. He was experiencing panic and depression. He was sleepless. He was on anxiety meds and he was addicted to them. He was avoiding social situations and his marriage was really going south. The whole thing was wrapped in shame, as I have been mentioning.

As we were working together, he was telling me what was going on and how hard it was, and I paused and said, "Do you realize that this is trauma—that you have been traumatized?" And he was startled. He had never named it that way. Now, sometimes naming it can be a box—a category that locks us in—but it can be really freeing when we are able to say: *Wow, this is a form of suffering and it is really intense.* So, I went on, "This is trauma, and it is not your fault. You are not alone. There are a lot of people I know that are experiencing something like this. Losing a job can be really traumatizing. And there are a lot of people who, for other reasons, are traumatized. But it is not your fault that your nervous system is responding this way." And that is when he began to weep, because the burden of feeling terrible and then hating himself for how he was dealing with it was crushing. Trauma is important—it's important that we identify it and it is important that we begin to loosen the bind of shame around it.

Part two. Once we have got it, and have identified that there is trauma, it takes a while to de-shame. You can see in twelve step groups, how powerfully helpful those are with addiction, that when we are able to really "get" that we are all in the same boat, it is less personal. So it is with trauma. When we understand that a lot of people are traumatized and this is how the nervous system responds to it, then we begin to say: *Okay, how can we resource? How can we begin to reconnect and reintegrate?*

In the shamanistic cultures, it is believed that when a person is traumatized, their soul leaves their body as a way to protect itself from intolerable pain. In a process they call Soul Retrieval, they bring together a community of people that are with the traumatized person, creating a tremendous amount of love and safety, and the soul is invited to return.

Likewise, in different healing contexts—whether it is in the care of a therapist or friend, or a group of friends, or with a teacher—we begin to find ways to create containers of safety and love. That is the beginning, because we were wounded, most of us, in relationship, and most of us need relationship to heal. If you think about the pervasive amount of traumatic wounding in early childhood, when there is neglect or when there is abuse, there is a lack of basic safety or trust, and that creates huge stress for the infant or young child—so much stress that floods of cortisol move through at a key developmental period for them—a key developmental period for the brain and for the parts of the brain that allow for socializing. Those neurons that connect are destroyed. Psychologist Louis Cozolino says: “It is not survival of the fittest. It is survival of the nurtured.”⁴ It is a really good line. When we are traumatized, the first needs are safety and love.

There is one young man I know who lives with a huge amount of anxiety and he has tried every modality I have ever heard of. And he said, “After doing all of these different processes and techniques, there is only one thing that works, and that is kindness.”

You see it with children. There is one story from a mom about her children that are having a really big fight. They go to bed after their fight and then there is a horrific thunderstorm in the middle of the night. And this woman said she heard a noise upstairs and she called to find out what was going on during the thunderstorm, and then a little voice answered, “We are in the closet forgiving each other.”

In a similar story I heard, there was, again, a storm at nighttime. You know, children get scared. And this little boy wanted to sleep with his parents. He would call out to his father and say, “Please can I come into your room?” And each time, his father would say, “You don’t have to. God is with you.” Then, twenty-five minutes later,

⁴ Cozolino, L. J., Ph.D. (2006). *The Neuroscience of Human Relationships: Attachment and the Developing Social Brain*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company.

he heard his son calling again and he would come and say, “God is with you. You are okay.” Finally, the third time, the little boy said to his dad, “I know God is with me. But I want someone with skin on.”

We know from research that when we are in relationship, it reduces fear. Research shows that when somebody is filled with fear and they hold hands with someone that they love or trust, you could watch their brain calm down on an MRI. And we know that hugs that last 20 seconds release oxytocin and that is incredibly soothing. And you can do the inner practices of loving-kindness and compassion that, in your mind, invoke a person you care about with you and loving you, and that can create the same biochemical shift—reducing the sympathetic nervous system and getting the parasympathetic nervous system going.

In clinical research—and this is bringing us now to meditation and how we practice—it has become very clear over the years, that it is not useful when there is a lot of trauma and really strong fear, to directly dive into the fear and open to it and be with it fully. It is really important to first soothe and calm and bring in a sense of safety and love—especially if it is trauma-based—and then the presence comes after that.

I’d like to share a story that illustrates how we can use meditation and mindfulness, in concert with practices that bring in that sense of safety, to work with really strong fears:

The person that I would like to describe was a parole officer in a state prison facility, and she attended my Wednesday classes for about four months before she asked if we could meet. When we did, she said that she was so restless that it was hard for her to sit through the class and she often couldn’t feel her body when I would do a body scan. Even trying to close her eyes felt hard sometimes. She said, “I am hyper-vigilant and it’s just very scary for me.”

Those are real signs of trauma. Many people find that, if they have been traumatized, trying to meditate—*close your eyes, come into the present moment, feel your body*—it is the exact opposite of what feels possible. The more trauma, the more dissociation.

So we talked a bit about her past and she had a history, as I had imagined, of repeated sexual abuse by her uncle over a number of years. And then her pattern continued with abusive relationships with partners. So, she had a lot of shame. She basically considered herself damaged goods and was very hard on herself and tough on others, particularly in her job. “But,” she said, “When I am triggered, I am just like this scared little girl and there is no center, there is nothing there.” Cigarettes and overeating had become her strategies to self-soothe.

As I have already described, she needed some sense of relationship, love, and safety to calm her down enough to begin to actually go toward the unlived life inside her. I asked her some questions that I often ask people who are meditators and who want to be able to find that internally. I asked her, “What is it that, in your life, gives you a sense of safety? When do you feel safe? When do you feel loved?”

For her, it was when she was with her sister or her best friend and, over the months, she included me—she called us her spirit allies. I asked her more questions: “When you are with people that are safe and loving, what is it like? How does it feel? Can you imagine it right now?”

She had me there already, and she imagined her sister and her friend and said, “You know, it is like being surrounded. It feels like being in a warm bath.”

And so I asked, “When you are in that warm bath and feeling surrounded, what is your deepest, deepest prayer?”

She answered, “Just... May I feel completely safe; May I feel fully loved.”

That became her practice. So, even if we were not physically present, she was able to invoke her community of spirit allies and, we would surround her, just as it was done in the shaman cultures. She could bring us to mind and sense that warmth and sense of being held, and she would use her prayer as a mantra: “May I feel safe... May I feel loved...”

I also taught her a few other really powerful ways to resource ourselves when there is trauma or strong fear. Grounding is important for any of us when we are caught or when we are stuck in that trance of reactivity. Start by feeling the pressure of your bottom against the seat that you are sitting on, the weight, your body, the warmth,

the place of contact. Feel your feet on the floor. Really become aware of gravity connecting you with the earth. You might feel where your hands are on your legs or touching each other. Grounding means to know you are here, right here. You can also ground visually. You might open your eyes and just scan in front of you, notice what you see. It might be you see feet, shapes of feet, you see the wood of the floor, you see the different shades of color in the wood. Part of grounding is to become visually aware of what is right here in the moment. If you are at home, you could look outside and see if you can actually name what you see so it brings you fully into the present moment.

If you close your eyes, another way of grounding is to scan through your body and sense if there is any place in your body that feels like safe space—where the sensations are pleasant or neutral. Again, you are grounding in your body, in the present moment. Anchoring. It might be the sensations in the hands. Just feel them right there...

Another way of grounding is to let the breath collect and center you. For some people that have been traumatized the breath is really helpful. For others, it is completely not helpful. So you have to kind of experiment. But if you want to use the breath to calm down your nervous system, it is a long, deep in-breath with a slow, long exhale. You might try it now: Inhaling deeply and then a slow out-breath. Slow in-breath, counting to six seconds, and a slow out-breath, another six seconds. So you are matching the length of the in-breath with the length of the out-breath. They are long and slow with no space in between. It is a circular breath; it just keeps going. There are variations on it, but there is much research that this kind of breathing can help to quiet and calm the nervous system.

Finally, just like what Dana did in terms of calling on her spirit allies, we can resource by bringing others to mind. You might begin by placing your hand over your heart, sensing that your touch is light enough that you actually feel a quality of tenderness. Part of resourcing is beginning to bring this quality of kindness, safety and presence right here to the inner life that needs it. Let your breath be slow, long and deep. Feel it in the heart. Scan in your mind and sense a time in the past when you were with someone with whom you felt safe and cared about. It could be a person that is alive or not alive. It could be an animal, could be your dog. It could be a friend, teacher or healer. It may be a relationship that is not so personal, but you feel the presence of that person in your mind, maybe a spiritual figure that really

helps you to feel safe and loved like Jesus or the Dalai Lama, the Buddha or Kuan Yin. Just imagine and sense the presence of this being with you right now and notice what the feelings are like. Sense whether there is a kind of warmth that can wash through you.

And then, when you are ready, relax your hand down and just sense that this experiment, and resourcing, is something that you can do at any time—especially when you are *not* caught in fear—and you will begin to find the pathways back to integration, the pathways back home again. The more you practice any one of these, the more quickly you find yourself coming back to presence when you are stuck in strong fear or reactivity.

With Dana, this is what we did. She was practicing this regularly, especially sensing her allies around her. And then she began the presencing.

The most important thing to remember with presencing—meaning being with exactly what is here—is that you need to become familiar with what we call the *window of tolerance* and the *window of distress*. If you hit distress, that is a sign to go back and resource more, or to go have a cup of tea, or go for a walk so as not to re-traumatize. The bottom-line teaching here is that it does not serve to try to be mindful and present with something if it re-traumatizes you. So, if you find yourself in the window of distress, give yourself permission to stop and do something else to try to get a little more online and integrated again. Gradually, you'll find that you can, more and more, be present with that un-lived life that you are running from.

And so, that was Dana's process. She was practicing doing that. And her time of most intensely being with that pocket of trauma came when she wasn't with me in therapy. She had just broken up with her boyfriend and he was enraged and she was afraid that he was going to stalk her. She was having a hard time sleeping and she realized how terrified she was, so she began doing the grounding—breathing and calling on her allies. The fear remained really intense, but she felt like she had just enough of a resourcing anchor there that she could be with it.

She described the feelings as “broken, hot glass tearing through her.” It was really, really intense. So, she kept whispering our names and re-grounding and allowing it to happen. She would say, “May I feel peaceful, may I feel safe, may I feel loved.” And finally, her body was trembling uncontrollably, but she started feeling like she

could be with it. She had enough safety and love that she could let that huge amount of intense energy move through her.

Gradually, she noticed a shift. The fear was still there, but she was more and more aware of the space around it and inside of it. She described the space of loving that she felt held in as larger than the scared self and said that the space started to fill with very warm, luminous light. She said, “It was like I was part of that light, and then I realized my soul was back. I started crying, feeling how all these years I had been lost, living without this light—living in a broken self.”

That experience of being present was a soul retrieval. What does it mean that her soul was back? She was reconnected to the spirit, the awareness, the love that is intrinsic to her and she was beginning to trust it more and more.

It is really hard, when there has been trauma, to revisit it and go back into the parts of our body where it is held. It is scary and we have to be resourced enough. What makes us willing to go through something like that?

For many people who have experienced trauma, there can be a really long time where there is a sense that our spirit has been tainted or destroyed. There is that much of a sense of being cut off. For Dana, she felt she had lost her soul. But it is not so. There is no amount of violence that can corrupt that timeless inner presence. The shame and fear might temporarily feel like they are taking over, but if we continue to pay attention and resource and gradually get more and more present, we will discover the loving awareness that really brings grace to our life. We intuit it. We know that even when we are cut off, there is something more.

After this experience that Dana had, she went through many rounds of feeling fear and having to re-ground and call on her allies. She felt like even though she sometimes felt cut off, she knew her way home—like when she got lost, she knew her way back. And she told me about one particular time, months after that soul retrieval experience, that really touched me.

She described phoning a recently paroled client who had missed one of his relapse prevention meetings. When she confronted him, he went on a rant—cursing and yelling saying, “You are like all the rest! You don’t give a shit what my life is like!”

And then he hung up on her. Her heart was pounding, her body was shaking and she felt like she had done something wrong. It set off some trauma.

So she did her practice. She sat still and grounded herself and she called on her allies. As she started relaxing, she sensed, again, that warmth and that light. She said, “I sensed the larger me holding myself.” Then, just as she had been with her inner self, she started asking: *Well, okay, so what about this man who has been so aggressive and threatening? What has he been feeling?* She started trying to feel into what it was like for him and, suddenly, she could sense the humiliation that he felt when she called him. She was confronting him about missing a meeting and he felt humiliated. And she could also sense the fear under his anger. And then when she asked herself what he needed most, she got just how much he needed, in some way, to feel safe and like he mattered.

So when he came in for his appointment, she was a little nervous but she said she felt open and confident. At first he was very sullen and wouldn’t look her in the eye. But then she started to ask questions with evident concern and he became more disclosing about how wild his friends were and how hard it was to stay clean. And right before leaving he said, “You know, maybe I got you wrong and I am sorry about that. Thank you for being on my team.”

This is a woman who was hugely hard on herself and others, unable to read people, and she found her soul—her spirit—and then was able to live it with another.

This path of recovery and healing and awakening is one of reconnecting to the life inside us, reconnecting with each other and reconnecting with all beings. And it begins in a very simple way with creating a safe and loving container for what is right here in the moment.

Reflection:

So I would like to invite you, right in this moment, just to scan and sense if there is anything asking for your attention right now... for your acceptance... for your inclusion. And sense the possibility of being able to offer some space of safety or some care to whatever is here. It might be the simple message: *You belong. Or: I am with you.* Or you might breathe right into the place where you are feeling the vulnerability or bring your hand gently to your heart and let the touch itself convey

the caring. Whether we have disconnected for a moment or for ten years, we can reconnect with our heart and spirit as we begin to offer this safety and presence to our own being.

We close with the words of Rashani Réa:

There is a brokenness
out of which comes the unbroken,
a shatteredness
out of which blooms the unshatterable.
There is a sorrow
beyond all grief which leads to joy
and a fragility
out of whose depths emerges strength.
There is a hollow space too vast for words
through which we pass with each loss,
out of whose darkness we are sanctioned into being.
There is a cry deeper than all sound
whose serrated edges cut the heart
as we break open
to the place inside which is unbreakable
and whole
while learning to sing.⁵

Thank you for your kind attention.

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~ join Tara's email list at: <http://eepurl.com/6YfI>.

⁵ Réa, R. (2001). The Unbroken. Retrieved March 26, 2017, from <http://rashani.com/arts/poems/poems-by-rashani/the-unbroken/>